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A Glimpse of the Genealogy of an Immigrant Book

Karl A. Olsson*

On a recent visit to Haddam Neck, CT, I had the pleasure of encountering a former student from North Park College in Chicago. She was Janet Christianson (now Mrs. Lowell Johnson) of Staten Island, NY. Janet's mother, among her family mementos, has a postil¹ by the Reverend J.O. Hoof with a fly-leaf inscription in Swedish which deserves translation, and this for two reasons: the book is inscribed by Janet's great grandmother and thus provides some biographical insight into that side of the family; furthermore, the fly-leaf gives us a glimpse of the growing value of books among the Swedish laity at this time. We need only recall that literacy became mandatory in Sweden by an act of 1842 and that consequently public education (reading, writing and arithmetic) became a much more available commodity.

The translation of the fly-leaf inscription is as follows. I have taken the liberty of making some minor changes in spelling for the sake of clarity.

"This postil by the Reverend J.O. Hoof² was purchased by me. The binding was stitched and the book bound in leather at my expense and is thus rightfully my property. However, after I loaned it to my brother, Sven Pehrsson in Öxnevalle Parish,³ it was sold without my knowledge at an auction arranged by the Public Welfare Board of the parish. It was subsequently purchased by Anders Hindrichsson of Jonskulla.⁴ However, it has now been redeemed, at my request, by Christian Carlsson in Rangelbo⁵ for the sum of one *Riksdaler Riksmünt*, and after my death shall accordingly belong to him or his heirs. This has been certified by my signature in the presence of summoned witnesses in Gammelsjö⁶ schoolhouse 21 October 1860.

Inger Pehrsondotter

Witnesses: C.J.Hansson

Olof F.Håkansson in Flyhult⁷

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Notes

¹ *Postil*, now a more or less archaic term, was a series of comments on a text of Scripture. The word comes from the Latin *postilla* which originally meant a gloss on the Gospel. The postils, organized according to the text cycles in the church year (the so-called lectionary or *pericope*) were standard sermon material in the National church but also in the disestablished churches of Sweden.

Under special circumstances, when inclement weather or long distances kept worshippers away from the parish church, the postils were read at so-called *byaböner* (village prayers) for those who assembled in individual homes or in larger groups of neighbors.

The Hoof postil was immensely popular but was no means the only commentary in common use. The postils of Anders Nohrborg, Peter Fjellstedt and Johann Arndt held a prominent place among the devotional books in the pastor's library but also increasingly on the bookshelf of pious laity.

² Jacob Otto Hoof, popular evangelical Lutheran clergyman, was born in Sättila Parish (Älvs.) 22 Oct. 1768, and died in Holsljunga Parish in the same county 10 Jan. 1839. He was the son of Abraham Hoof, a non-commissioned army officer, and Anna Håkansdotter. After theological studies at the University of Lund and at the University of Greifswald in Germany, Hoof was given the position as vicar in Svenljunga Parish (Älvs.).

Hoof seems to have been strongly influenced by both the older pietism which stressed observance of the devout life and by the emphasis upon grace of contemporary Moravians, and, after a spiritual crisis of some depth, he devoted himself to a ministry of revival and reformation. There are several anecdotes about Hoof's conversion which suggest the spiritual climate in which he matured. One of these stories is that on one dark December night at his home in Floghult in Holsljunga he saw Christ through the window, hanging on the cross between the two thieves.

A long life of proclamation and exhortation followed. Hoof's preaching became predominantly pietistic and evangelical and his fiery sermons were collected and published as early as 1823-1828. He became popular not only in Sweden but in neighboring Norway and attracted numerous followers who were known as "Hoofians." They developed a distinctive life style and manner of dress characterized by the utmost simplicity and somberness of color. There may be more than an accidental connection between the austerity of the Hoofians and the phenomenon of the "Criers," who surfaced in Sweden in the 1840s. — *Svenska män och kvinnor*, I-VIII (Stockholm 1942-1955), III, p. 530; *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* (Stockholm 1972), fascicle 93, pp. 331-335; C.W. Skarstedt, *Göteborgs stifts herdaminne* (Lund 1885), p. 784; E.J. Ekman, *Den inre missionens historia* I-III (Stockholm 1896-1902), I, pp. 263-268; Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago 1962), pp. 60-64; 650.

³ This is Öxnevalle Parish in Älvsborg County. While I have found no farm or village named Åsa in Öxnevalle, there is an Åsa village in neighboring Ölmevalle Parish in Halland county. — C.M. Rosenberg, *Geografiskt-statistiskt handlexikon öfver Sverige*, I-II (Stockholm 1882-1883), IV, pp. 1129, 1225.

⁴ Jonskulla is a farm in Öxnevalle Parish. In the fly-leaf inscription it is spelled "Josskulla." — *Ibid.*, III, p. 865.

⁵ Rangelbo is a village in Gammelsjö Parish (Älvs.), just south of Öxnevalle. — *Ibid.*

⁶ Gammelsjö schoolhouse, in which the agreement was signed, was probably adjacent to the parish church and hence under the supervision of both the parish clergyman and the cantor. After the legislation of 1842 the parish church became more and more a center of educational activity in the parish.

⁷ Flyhult is a village in Gunnarsjö Parish. — Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, I, p. 433.